



Unmasking crime roots: Youth perspectives on contributing factors in extension 39, Mahikeng, South Africa

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Abstract

The prevalence of young people's involvement in crime and violence in South Africa has been observed for some time. Global statistics consistently indicate that young people are disproportionately involved in crime and violence, both as perpetrators and victims. This paper explores youth perspectives on the contributing factors to crime in Extension 39, Mahikeng, South Africa. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with a sample size of 16 youth and key informants including one ward councilor, four South African Police Service (SAPS) members, one Community Police Forum (CPF) representative, and 10 community members. Focus group discussions with 16 youth aged 18-35 were also conducted. Content thematic was used to analyse the raw data and findings were presented as interview excerpts. The findings indicate that crime in the area is driven by socio-economic challenges, including unemployment and poverty, compounded by a lack of community cohesion and low crime reporting. These factors create an environment conducive to crime, highlighting the connection between individual behavior and structural issues. Social fragmentation and mistrust further hinder collective crime prevention efforts. The study emphasizes the need for context-specific crime prevention strategies that address both symptoms and root causes. Tackling unemployment and poverty, fostering community cohesion, and empowering youth through education, skills development, and leadership opportunities are crucial for breaking the cycle of crime. These findings provide insights into community challenges and suggest strategies for enhancing youth participation in crime prevention. The paper proposes policies that foster youth employment, skill development fostering trust-building mechanisms to improve and strengthen crime reporting.

Key words: South Africa, Youth, Crime, Community, Poverty, Unemployment.

Introduction

Various developmental obstacles confronting Africa are closely tied to high crime rates, including issues such as income disparity, rapid urbanisation, and a predominantly youthful population. Furthermore, pervasive violent conflicts frequently correlate with organised crime, resulting in significant societal repercussions that can further exacerbate criminal activities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2005). South Africa, ranked 127th out of 163 countries on the Global Peace Index in 2018, is considered one of the world's most dangerous and unsafe countries. The 2023 Global Peace Index highlighted a concerning trend of declining global peacefulness for the ninth consecutive year. South Africa experienced a decline, dropping to the 130th spot in 2022 (DefenseWeb, 2023). The Governance, Public Safety, and

Justice Survey 2022/23 corroborated these findings, showing a slight decline in the proportion of individuals aged 16 and above who reported feeling secure while walking alone in their local communities during daylight hours, dropping from 81.3% in 2021/22 to 80.8% in 2022/23. According to the 2024 World Population Review, South Africa ranks fifth on the global crime index, following Venezuela, Papua New Guinea, Afghanistan, and Haiti (World Population Review, 2024). From April 2018 to March 2019, an estimated 2 million crimes were recorded in South Africa. Murder, a key measure of violent crime, rose by 1.4% to 21,325 from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, equating to approximately 58 individuals killed daily.

The murder rate has remained consistent at around 36 per 100,000 people. In 2017, South Africa recorded 21,022 murders, an increase of 3.4% from the previous year (Africa Check, 2018). Consequently, South Africa accounts for some of the highest levels of violent crime globally (Du Plessis & Louw, 2005). Research demonstrates a significant involvement of young people in both criminal activities and violence, with young men frequently identified as both perpetrators and victims (Manaliyo & Muzindutsi, 2013). Delinquent behavior among youth is shaped by a complex interplay of individual, social, and communal factors, often perpetuating a generational cycle of violence and criminality (De Wet et al., 2018).

In South Africa, teenagers and young adults aged 15 to 29 comprising about 35.7% of the population constitute most of both victims and offenders of violent crime (Evans, 2018). Recognizing the critical role of youth in addressing crime, the government has emphasized community participation through initiatives like the Crime Prevention Strategy (1996), the White Paper on Safety and Security (1998), the National Crime Combating Strategy, the National Gang Strategy, and the National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030. However, these policies have been hindered by a lack of cohesion and effective leadership (Holtmann, 2009). This finding aligns with Magwaza (2019), who indicates that youth are more likely than other age groups to both perpetrate and fall victim to crime. The South African Police Service (SAPS) Annual Report (2020/21) revealed that individuals aged 18 to 34 were responsible for 56.6% of all murder cases in 2020/21, illustrating a clear link between the youth population and high crime rates. With a growing youth population, many young people face challenges in securing employment, contributing to rising poverty rates. Poverty is a critical structural factor contributing to youth crime, with wide-ranging implications for individual behaviour and societal stability. It undermines self-confidence and self-respect, as it deeply affects individuals' sense of self-worth and belonging (Seglow, 2020).

Globally, there has been a significant increase in youth populations, a trend that carries profound implications for societal development and security (Ukwayi et al., 2019). A study in West Africa found that many youths engaged in violence and crime due to socio-economic hardships and the collapse of state structures, underscoring the link between structural deprivation and youth criminality (Peters, 2012). Similarly, in Egypt, Alfy (2016) attributes escalating violence since 2011 to the country's large youth population and rising unemployment among university graduates. In 2013, youth aged 15 to 29 comprised 29% of Egypt's population, yet experienced disproportionate unemployment rates: 40% among 20- to 24-year-olds, 23% among 25- to 29-year-olds, and 32% among university graduates.

These conditions contributed to the rise of youth-led movements such as the April 6 Movement and the Black Bloc, which engaged in significant acts of political violence (Alfy, 2016). In the United States (US),

David-Ferdon et al., (2014) highlights the stark contrast in youth violence compared to other developed nations. Youth homicide rates in the U.S. are 3 to 40 times higher than those in comparable high-income countries. Despite notable economic growth in regions such as West Africa—home to six of the ten fastest-growing economies on the continent between 2000 and 2020—poverty remains pervasive. Economic growth has not translated into equitable wealth distribution, with 1% of the population controlling the majority of the region's wealth (Coulibaly, 2018; Oxfam, 2019). Consequently, 30% of West Africans live in poverty, surviving on less than \$1.90 per day. This economic disparity exacerbates social inequalities and fosters environments conducive to criminal activity. Similarly, in South Africa, poverty rates remain high, with about 26.4% of the population living below the poverty line as of 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Among young people aged 18 to 25, approximately 58% reside in households with monthly incomes below R1,500 (roughly US\$100), highlighting the acute challenges faced by this demographic. Empirical evidence supports the notion that poverty is positively correlated with criminal behaviour. Webster & Kingston (2014) argue that factors such as unemployment exacerbate the relationship between poverty and crime.

Research Objective

This study is guided by the following research objective:

1. To explore youth perspectives on the contributing factors to crime in Extension 39, Mahikeng, South Africa.

Literature Review

The previous research underscores that youth crime is not merely the result of personal deviance but is deeply influenced by broader systemic and contextual forces (Ward et al., 2013; Goldson and Muncie, 2015). This section examines the root causes of youth crime.

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In the United States, David-Ferdon et al., (2014) highlight the stark contrast in youth violence compared to other developed nations. Youth homicide rates in the U.S. are 3 to 40 times higher than those in comparable high-income countries. This finding aligns with the South African Institute for Security Studies (2023), which indicates that youth are more likely than other age groups to both perpetrate and fall victim to crime. These studies underscore a consistent pattern: countries with a bulging youth population often face heightened incidences of crime and violence. The SAPS Annual Report (2020/21) revealed that individuals aged 18 to 34 were responsible for 56.6% of all murder cases in 2020/21, illustrating a clear link between the youth population and high crime rates. With a growing youth population, many young people face challenges in securing employment, contributing to rising poverty rates.

Poverty is a critical structural factor contributing to youth crime, with wide-ranging implications for individual behaviour and societal stability. It undermines self-confidence and self-respect, as it deeply affects individuals' sense of self-worth and belonging (Seglow, 2020). Despite notable economic growth in regions such as West Africa—home to six of the ten fastest-growing economies on the continent between

2000 and 2020—poverty remains pervasive. Economic growth has not translated into equitable wealth distribution, with 1% of the population controlling most the region's wealth (Coulibaly, 2018; Oxfam, 2019). Consequently, 30% of West Africans live in poverty, surviving on less than \$1.90 per day. This economic disparity exacerbates social inequalities and fosters environments conducive to criminal activity. Similarly, in South Africa, poverty rates remain high, with about 26.4% of the population living below the poverty line as of 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Among young people aged 18 to 25, approximately 58% reside in households with monthly incomes below R1,500 (roughly US\$100), highlighting the acute challenges faced by this demographic. Empirical evidence supports the notion that poverty is positively correlated with criminal behaviour. Webster and Kingston (2014) argue that factors such as unemployment exacerbate the relationship between poverty and crime.

Unemployment, particularly among youth, is widely recognised as a significant contributor to crime. Studies consistently demonstrate a correlation between high unemployment rates and increased criminal activity, as young people without access to legitimate income sources may resort to illegal activities to meet their needs (Idris, 2016; Ukwai et al., 2019). Prolonged unemployment often results in diminished self-esteem, frustration, and a sense of purposelessness, which can escalate into criminal behaviour (Kubendei, 2018).

South Africa faces critical challenges in addressing youth unemployment, which is compounded by poverty and stark socio-economic inequalities (Kruger & Landman, 2008). At the end of 2021, youth unemployment reached a staggering 64.18% among individuals aged 15 to 34, as shown in Table 2 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). This persistent unemployment disproportionately affects the country's youth, leaving them particularly susceptible to the frustrations and social exclusions that often lead to criminal behaviour. Historical unemployment trends in South Africa reflect a significant deterioration, with unemployment rising from 30% in the late 1990s to current levels (Tshabalala, 2014). Effective interventions should focus on equipping young people with marketable skills, creating employment opportunities, and fostering their integration into society. Such approaches are essential for reducing crime rates and ensuring the socio-economic stability of communities.

Theoretical Grounding

The study is grounded in the Crime Pattern Theory and Community Development Theory to provide a holistic approach to youth participation in crime prevention. Although no single individual is credited with the creation of Crime Pattern Theory, its development has been significantly influenced by renowned scholars such as Paul and Patricia Brantingham. Their contributions emphasise the importance of spatial and temporal factors in shaping criminal behaviour, as outlined in their seminal work (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981; 2008). The theory advances that crime emanates from the social environment. In other words, community dynamics, such as social cohesion and collective efficacy, significantly influence crime patterns. While areas with high poverty or unemployment may generate offenders, strong social bonds often deter criminal behaviour (Babcicky & Seebauer, 2020; Chyn & Katz, 2021). On the other hand, Community Development Theory (Tan, 2009) underscores the significance of community-driven solutions and collective action that foster youth agency and shared responsibility in preventing crime. It highlights the importance of equipping youth with skills through collaborative engagements with stakeholders to build community resilience and reduce criminal activity (Tan, 2009).

Together, this framework shifts the focus from youth vulnerabilities to their potential, guiding them to understand the root causes of crime in their communities and to develop effective strategies. It fosters the ability of youth to participate meaningfully in crime prevention activities, strengthens their capacity as change agents, and builds community resilience against crime. By leveraging these interconnected theories,

the study advances a comprehensive understanding of youth development and crime prevention in Extension 39.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which is particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena such as youth crime and crime prevention within marginalised communities (Neuman, 2011). A phenomenological design was employed, which focuses on understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals within their natural settings (Qutoshi, 2018). Focus group discussions and key informant interviews allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of how young people perceive crime and their involvement in crime prevention initiatives, as well as the factors that influence their participation in such activities. The population for this study comprised youth of aged between 18 and 35 years residing in Mmabatho Extension 39, a peri-urban residential area in the Mahikeng Local Municipality, North-West Province, South Africa. These individuals were selected based on their significant role in crime prevention and community safety efforts, as well as their direct involvement in the socio-political landscape of Extension 39. These comprised 16 youth participants aged 18 to 35 from the four phases of Extension 39 and 16 key informants, including a ward councillor, four SAPS members, a CPF representative and ten community members, in total a sample of 32 participants.

Non-probability sampling techniques were employed, specifically purposive and snowball sampling methods, which are commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who can provide rich, in-depth insights into the research topic (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling was used to identify youth participants who were directly involved in or affected by crime prevention activities, ensuring that the sample was relevant to the study's focus (Denscombe, 2007). Snowball sampling was then used to further identify additional participants through referrals from initial respondents, allowing for a broader pool of youth perspectives, including those who may not have been easily accessible through initial recruitment channels. The sampling process was concluded when data saturation was reached, a point at which no new themes or insights emerged during data collection. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and suitability for interpreting complex qualitative data, allowing the researcher to systematically examine the data for recurring themes related to youth crime prevention. The study adhered to the North-West University guidelines for research ethics and integrity to ensure the integrity of the research process as well as the protection of participants. Ethical clearance NWU-02103-20-A7 was obtained from the NWU Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of North-West University (NWU). Participants were asked for consent to record both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with pseudonyms used to protect their identities. Furthermore, the research report omitted references to the names of participating organisations to maintain confidentiality and uphold ethical standards. To ensure the integrity of the study, addressing the questions of validity and trustworthiness of data was of paramount importance. First, meticulous record-keeping was undertaken throughout the research process, including detailed notes on participant responses, researcher reflections, and methodological decisions, to provide an audit trail that enhances transparency and accountability. Second, peer debriefing was conducted, where fellow researchers critically examined the data and interpretations to ensure that biases were minimised, and the findings remained grounded in the data. This process also provided an opportunity to challenge assumptions and refine the analytical approach. Validation of data with respondents was integral to the study, as participants were invited to review the findings to confirm their accuracy and resonance with their perceptions.

Understanding the Dynamics of Crime in Extension 39: A Youth Perspective

The objective of this paper is to explore youth perspectives on the contributing factors to crime in Extension 39. Understanding how community members, particularly the youth, perceive the factors contributing to crime. Participants provided insights into the social, economic, and environmental dynamics shaping the occurrence of criminal activities within their community. This section is structured around key sub-themes that emerged during the analysis, as shown in Figure 1 below



Figure 1: Themes and subthemes from the findings (Source: 2024 field data)

As shown in Figure 1, the causes include lack of community cohesion, lack of reporting or failure to report crime, unemployment, and poverty. Each of these factors contributes to the context in which crime thrives, influencing both the motivations for criminal behaviour and the barriers to its prevention. Together, the findings reflect the interplay between individual actions and broader structural issues. Participants consistently linked crime in Extension 39 to socio-economic challenges, including unemployment and poverty, and emphasised how social fragmentation and mistrust hinder collective efforts to address these issues. The sub-themes below provide a detailed exploration of the community's perceptions of crime and the root causes, supported by direct quotes from participants.

Lack of community cohesion

The lack of community cohesion emerged as a significant factor contributing to crime in Extension 39. Participants highlighted how disengagement, fragmented relationships, and a lack of collective action among residents created opportunities for criminal activity. This reflects broader structural and social dynamics often observed in marginalised communities. The findings identify social fragmentation as a key driver of crime in marginalised areas. The disconnection is exemplified in how many community members view crime prevention as the sole responsibility of law enforcement or the CPF, leading to a lack of active engagement.

Participants frequently expressed that many community members believed that crime prevention was solely the responsibility of SAPS and the CPF, rather than a shared duty. CM4 observed:

“Community members do not work together because they feel it’s the work of the police and the community police forum to keep the community safe. Some of the community members do not report crime to protect the criminals (Interview with CM4:2023).”

Similarly, CM8 noted that residents often prioritised leisure activities over community safety initiatives:

“Some community members do not attend meetings when the CPF calls for a community meeting to address crime in the area. They would rather go to taverns and don’t care about their community (Interview with CM8:2023).”

Findings above reveal that stable social networks and strong local engagement can lower the occurrence of crime. While social cohesion is often seen as a protective factor against crime, it can also have negative implications. Barolsky et al., (2016) argue that cohesion can foster exclusionary practices or vigilante justice, perpetuating cycles of violence. The findings reflect this dynamic, with participants noting that some community members protect offenders, further weakening trust between residents and the Community Policing Forum. Langa et al., (2016) also caution that poorly managed community initiatives can exacerbate tensions. For instance, the Community Work Programme (CWP), while designed to foster engagement, has sometimes led to conflicts and rivalries that undermine its objectives. These findings highlight the complexity of fostering social cohesion in marginalised communities.

Exploitation of youth by elders

A troubling dynamic revealed by CP1 was the exploitation of vulnerable youth by some elders within the community:

“It is difficult to work in a community where the community does not work together. Some of the elders use young people to advance their criminal life, they lure them with money and drugs, and this is misleading the youth (Interview with CP1:2023).”

This exploitation perpetuates crime and exacerbates generational disempowerment. As noted by Langa et al., (2016), fragmented communities often experience conflicts that worsen the cycle of violence. In the absence of strong social cohesion, vulnerable individuals, particularly youth, are more likely to be co-opted into criminal activities.

Challenges in Community Support for CPF Initiatives and Engagement

Participants highlighted the CPF’s efforts to address crime but noted that broader community support was often lacking. CM2 lamented that

“it’s always the CPF working hard to keep the community safe while the rest of the community doesn’t care” (Interview with CM2:2023).

While CPF initiatives are rooted in civic cooperation, their success depends on robust community participation. Barolsky et al., (2016) emphasises that while social cohesion can act as a protective factor, it requires active and consistent participation from all community members. Without such collaboration, CPF efforts are insufficient to address the broader structural and social factors driving crime in Extension 39.

Failure to Report Crime

The absence of reporting was additionally perceived as a contributing factor to the occurrence of criminal activities in Extension 39, Mafikeng Local Municipality. Participants highlighted that many residents choose not to report crimes due to various factors, including fear of retaliation, poor police services, distrust

in law enforcement, and the stigma associated with being labelled a "snitch" (*impimpi* in Setswana, a local language in South Africa). These concerns reflect systemic challenges in policing and community engagement, mirroring broader issues identified in the literature on crime and justice in South Africa (Masiloane, 2014; Mosha, 2024).

The fear of being labelled a "snitch" or *impimpi* was another significant deterrent to crime reporting. This stigma discourages residents from cooperating with law enforcement, particularly in tight-knit communities where social ostracism can have severe consequences.

Participant CM4 intimated that:

"People sometimes don't report crimes to shield criminals. They're afraid of being called 'impimpi,' which is a serious insult in this community. Young people, especially girls, might be scared to report crimes because they fear older people, particularly male perpetrators. This is especially true for crimes like rape, where women are afraid of being victimized again. They might either not report at all, or they might report and then drop the case later." (Interview with CM4:2023).

The findings above show how cultural barriers like honouring elders and patriarchy can entrench barriers to reporting. Women and younger community members who fear victimisation may be reluctant to report criminal activities. The literature corroborates these findings, with studies showing that the social stigma associated with reporting crime often outweighs the perceived benefits of doing so (Mosha, 2024).

Participants frequently cited fear of retaliation as a primary reason for the underreporting of crime. The fear of being targeted by criminals after reporting crime discourages many community members from engaging with law enforcement. This fear is particularly acute in a socio-economic context where protective mechanisms, such as adequate policing and community safety structures, are absent or ineffective.

One participant articulated this fear:

"Reporting crimes to the police should be an easy and straightforward thing, but we are afraid to report because we fear for our lives. I have kids to look after" (Interview with CM4:2023).

This sentiment aligns with findings from Holgersson (2022), who emphasises that fear of victimisation is a critical barrier to crime reporting globally. This fear fosters a cycle of silence, allowing offenders to continue their activities unimpeded and undermining community safety. Fear and lack of empowerment among community members inhibit collective action, further weakening social cohesion and enabling criminal activities to flourish. The Crime Pattern Theory (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2021) highlights the importance of data accuracy for identifying hotspots and allocating resources effectively. The underreporting of crime disrupts this process, limiting law enforcement's ability to implement targeted interventions.

Poor Police Services

Inadequate service delivery from the SAPS was another recurring theme which led to underreporting or lack of reporting. Participants reported long waits, lack of responsiveness, and insufficient follow-through on reported cases. Participant CM10 described a frustrating experience:

"I once went to the police station to report a crime. I went very early to be first online. The service was really bad. I spent the

whole day at the police station waiting for a police van to accompany me (Interview with CM10:2023)."

CM6 similarly noted:

"What is the use of reporting when things do not change? Some people go to the police station to report a crime, and the next day, they see the same criminal walking the streets. We stand on long queues for nothing (Interview with CM6:2023)."

Participants mentioned that low reporting emanated from the weak police and community relations, lack of trust thereby discouraging reporting. These inefficiencies discourage residents from reporting crimes, further perpetuating a sense of insecurity within communities. These accounts are consistent with findings from Koopman & Vuma (2022), who argue that resource constraints, such as a lack of vehicles and personnel, weak community and law enforcement significantly hinder SAPS's ability to respond effectively to reported crimes.

The underreporting of crime disrupts this process, limiting law enforcement's ability to implement targeted interventions. Distrust in the police also emerged as a significant barrier. Participants expressed scepticism about the police's commitment to protecting community members, with some alleging collusion between law enforcement and criminals. This distrust reflects broader systemic challenges within South Africa's criminal justice system, as noted by Masiloane (2014). A participant shared revealed that:

"Some people don't report crimes because they know the police work with criminals. You report someone today, and tomorrow you see them walking around (Interview with CM6:2023)."

This lack of trust undermines community-police partnerships, which are essential for effective crime prevention. Without this trust, residents are less likely to participate in initiatives such as CPFs or report crimes, further weakening crime prevention efforts. Improving police responsiveness and transparency is critical. This aligns with Crime Pattern Theory, which highlights the role of accurate data in effective crime prevention strategies (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2021). Enhancing police capacity through better training, increased resources, and community collaboration can help rebuild trust and encourage greater community participation in crime prevention initiatives.

The Relationship Between Unemployment and Occurrence of Crime

Participants consistently emphasised the relationship between unemployment and the escalation of crime in Extension 39. Participant CP1 captured this sentiment as follows:

"Young people in the community do not work and end up resorting to crime. The government needs to intervene (Interview with CP1:2023)."

This aligns with findings from Mazorodze (2020) and Jubane (2020), who argue that high youth unemployment rates are closely associated with social instability and increased criminal activity. Without access to employment or skills development programs, youth face limited alternatives, fostering frustration and hopelessness. Participant CM8 confided his frustration and possible risks:

"I am not working, and sometimes when I see some of my peers with branded clothing, cars, and having money, I get frustrated, and one day I will resort to crime because it pays" (Interview with CM8:2023)."

Such sentiments align with Ntshiza's (2018) research, which highlights the link between youth unemployment and societal challenges, including poverty, substance abuse, and crime. The inability to secure employment diminishes self-worth and fosters a sense of helplessness, driving many young individuals toward criminal activities as a survival mechanism.). The SAPS Annual Report (2020/21) revealed that at a national level individuals aged 18 to 34 were responsible for 56.6% of all murder cases in 2020/21, illustrating a clear link between the youth population and high crime rates. Furthermore, unemployment not only affects economic well-being but also has significant psychological and social consequences. Participants reported feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and despair due to their inability to meet basic needs. Participant CM6 highlighted this emotional toll:

“There are no job opportunities, and this makes life very difficult, especially for young people in the community. Not working is not nice; you cannot afford to buy yourself a burger when you feel like it. Our parents cannot take care of us forever. In our Tsotsi language, we say Spendi wa bulala, spendi wa philisa (bravery kills, or bravery can give a better life) (Interview with CM6:2023).”

This reflects the pervasive impact of unemployment on mental health, as well as its role in normalising criminal activity to achieve social and economic mobility. The Crime Pattern Theory highlighting how unemployment influences the spatial and temporal dynamics of crime, with individuals more likely to engage in criminal activities in areas of economic deprivation (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2021). Akinola & Ohonba (2024) also identify unemployment as a driver of rising crime rates, particularly in contexts of economic instability. They suggest that effective governance, including policies to combat corruption and strengthen the rule of law, is essential to creating employment opportunities and reducing crime.

Correlation Between Poverty and Increased Crime

The eradication of poverty remains a significant challenge for governments worldwide. Despite being a longstanding priority for sustainable development, poverty continues to affect individuals at alarming rates (Mdluli-Maziya et al., 2024). Cheteni et al., (2018) found a strong correlation between poverty and criminal activity, which persists in both the short and long term. Participants in this study identified poverty as a critical factor influencing crime prevalence and community safety in Extension 39. They highlighted that high poverty levels, exacerbated by unemployment and limited access to opportunities, significantly contribute to criminal activities among youth and adults. These activities are seen as survival strategies in the face of economic deprivation. Participant CM3 noted:

“Poverty can drive people to engage in activities they never imagined; in the case of our sisters, they can resort to prostitution to secure food and prevent involvement in criminal activities (Interview with CM3:2023).”

This aligns with Haque and Muniruzzaman's (2020) findings, which demonstrated that poverty is a primary driver of criminal activity, as individuals living in impoverished conditions often have no other means to achieve economic stability. The absence of necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter exacerbates stress levels, pushing individuals to engage in criminal acts such as theft, robbery, or violence.

Poverty also renders young people vulnerable to exploitation by criminal networks. Participant CM5 stated that:

“Young people are used by drug dealers to sell drugs to their peers; sometimes they are paid in cash (Interview with CM5:2023).”

Similarly, participant CM7 revealed that *“some of the young people are involved in gangs to make a living and stay out of poverty”* (Interview with CM7:2023).

These findings reveal that young people lacking access to education, employment, and positive role models often turn to gang life for financial support and a sense of belonging. This dynamic is consistent with Benson et al. (2011), who observed that economic hardship compels young people to prioritise immediate survival over community engagement, reducing their participation in crime prevention activities. Similarly, a link between crime and poverty was exhibited in the United States where approximately 38% of African American children have lived in persistent poverty over recent decades (Patten & Krogstad, 2015). Moreover, the reliance on criminal networks perpetuates cycles of violence and insecurity within communities

Conclusions

The study concludes that crime in Extension 39 is driven by interconnected factors, including unemployment, poverty, lack of social cohesion, underreporting of crimes, and substance abuse. Addressing these challenges is essential to reducing crime and fostering youth participation in prevention efforts. The lack of community cohesion discourages young people from engaging in crime prevention, as they feel unsupported and disconnected. Building a sense of belonging and trust within the community is crucial to motivating youth to contribute meaningfully to such initiatives. The culture of underreporting criminal activities, driven by fear, mistrust of law enforcement, and feelings of despair, further exacerbates the problem. Tackling underreporting through community outreach, education, and addressing its root causes can help break the cycle of silence that enables criminal activities. Unemployment and poverty were identified as major contributors to crime, with young people often turning to illegal activities as a means of survival or purpose. Providing training programs, meaningful opportunities, and economic empowerment initiatives is vital to redirecting youth toward constructive roles in society. Ultimately, addressing these systemic issues requires the active involvement of government stakeholders to create sustainable solutions, such as employment generation, social assistance programs, and community-building initiatives, to promote safer, more cohesive communities. However, the implementation of crime prevention strategies faces significant challenges. These may include but not limited to resource limitations, such as insufficient funding, staff shortages, lack of political will and inadequate mentor training, pose obstacles to crime prevention efforts. Additionally, community resistance and a lack of trust can hinder the recruitment of both mentors and mentees, further impeding the programme's success. This study proposes effective partnerships among local stakeholders, law enforcement, and community members are essential for overcoming existing barriers and fostering a culture of collective responsibility.

Recommendations

This paper recommends several strategies to address the contributing factors to crime in Extension 39 based on youth perspectives.

For Policy Makers

- The paper proposes policies that foster youth employment, skill development fostering trust-building mechanisms to improve and strengthen crime reporting.

- Policies aimed at creating economic opportunities that alleviate poverty for young people, empowering them to actively participate in their communities and fostering long-term, collaborative solutions to crime prevention should be prioritized.
- To effectively facilitate youth participation in crime prevention, it is important to advocate for policy changes that distribute essential resources and implement protective measures aimed at mitigating substance abuse and reducing the fear of victimization.

For Community leaders

- Community leaders should incorporate youth into decision-making processes and community initiatives create avenues for them to develop critical thinking, develop leadership abilities, and gain a sense of ownership of their communities.
- Leader should promote mentoring strategies to foster positive behaviours amongst youth in crime prevention interventions.
- Community leaders should engage youth in community structures, communities can foster safer environments, promote social cohesion, and empower young people to take ownership of their communities' well-being.
- Community leaders should strengthen collaboration and trust between the police, the CPF, and the community. Encouraging healthy working relationships among these stakeholders is essential for effective crime prevention and the promotion of community safety in Extension 39

For Law Enforcement

- Law enforcement should include youth in Community Police Forums, and community advisory boards, which encourage active community involvement in safety efforts. Within these frameworks, the involvement of youth is essential, as their participation brings innovative perspectives and enhances the effectiveness of crime prevention initiatives.
- Law enforcement should work with schools and colleges to focus on prevention, identify youth at risk and promote early interventions for at risk youths.

Implications for Effective Crime Prevention Strategies Within Communities

Engaging young people in decision-making processes not only serves to empower them but improve the efficacy and sustainability of initiatives established to reduce crime. This perspective underscores the importance of recognizing youth as valuable contributors who can drive meaningful change within their communities. By highlighting their potential, it encourages a proactive approach to youth participation, inspiring innovation and fostering partnerships to tackle social challenges effectively.

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